

LIS 229: Indigenous Knowledge System (2 Units: 30 LH)

LIS 229: DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS/NATURE AND VALUE OF ORAL TRADITION/ORAL HISTORY

Definition of Concepts

1. **Indigenous** Something which is indigenous is originally from the country in which it is found, rather than coming or being brought there from some other country

2. Traditional

Traditional is something - like dress and customs - that has existed in a place without changing for a long time. 2. Traditional are the beliefs and attitudes that have existed in a place for a long time and are not exposed to change. 3. Traditional is an organisation or institution in which older methods are used in preference to modern ones.

3. Knowledge

Knowledge is information and understanding about a subject, which a person has in his or her mind or which is shared by all human beings

4. System

A system is a way of working, organising, or doing something in which you follow a fixed plan or set of rules. 2. A system is also the way that a whole institution or aspect of society has been organised and arranged. 3. If a situation or activity has some system, it has a sense of orderliness or good organisation. 4. The system of something is the way in which it is arranged so that all its parts fit together or work together

5. Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge may be defined as knowledge that is unique to a particular culture or society. It is used to describe the knowledge systems developed by a community as opposed to the scientific knowledge that is generally acquired through formal education or empirical findings. Indigenous knowledge differs from the knowledge system generated by universities, research institutions and private firms in the sense that it is neither offered nor acquired through a formal setting.

Indigenous knowledge is also regarded as communal knowledge, localised knowledge, the knowledge of the indigenous people inhabiting different geographical regions of the

world with their own language, culture, tradition, belief, folklore, rites and rituals.

It also refers to the accumulated wisdom, skills, and practices developed by indigenous communities over generations.

It is often specific to a particular community or region and passed down orally or through practice.

- Examples include traditional farming methods, herbal medicine, weather prediction, and conservation techniques.

6. Indigenous Knowledge System

IKS encompasses a broader framework that includes the ways knowledge is generated, stored, shared, and applied.

IKS recognizes indigenous knowledge as a structured, dynamic system that interacts with cultural, social, and environmental factors.

It includes not only the knowledge itself but also the institutions, values, and methodologies used to preserve and transmit it.

7. Oral Tradition

Oral traditions are cultural heritages transmitted from one generation to another. They are messages, information and testimonies of a group of people transmitted through speeches, songs and the like. It is also a story, tradition or practice that is shared orally-usually handed down from generation to generation. Oral traditions are media of presenting ancient culture, history and experiences of the past generation.

8. Oral History

Oral history is a method of preserving and recording historical information through spoken accounts from individuals or communities who have experienced past events firsthand. It involves structured interviews where people share their memories, stories, traditions, and lived experiences, often passed down through generations.

9. Digitisation

Digitization refers to the process of converting traditional, oral, or physical forms of indigenous knowledge (IK) into digital formats such as text, audio, video, and images into a digital format. This is for the purpose of allowing for easier preservation, access, and sharing through technologies like online databases, audio recordings, and video documentation, thereby enabling wider dissemination and revitalization of cultural heritage while mitigating the risk of knowledge loss due to the passing of generations. Digitization also involves capturing and storing indigenous knowledge in a digital format, often including practices, stories, languages, and ecological knowledge, with careful consideration of cultural sensitivity and community engagement throughout the process.

10. Institutional Repository

An Institutional Repository (IR) is a digital platform established by universities, research institutions, and organizations to collect, store, preserve, and provide access to scholarly and cultural materials, including indigenous knowledge (IK). It plays a crucial role in safeguarding and promoting indigenous heritage by ensuring that traditional knowledge is properly documented, archived, and made accessible in a responsible and ethical manner. Institutional repositories digitise and store indigenous knowledge, ensuring its survival for future generations.

They provide long-term storage for oral traditions, manuscripts, indigenous languages, and cultural practices.

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NATURE AND VALUE OF ORAL TRADITION

ORAL TRADITIONS

Oral tradition had been from the time of creation and is as old as man himself. In the African setting before time, the place of oral tradition was incontrovertible. Through the oral tradition passed from generation to generation, people of historical prominence were abl

e to discover their origin. Oral source is one of the greatest and valuable sources of history, literature and literary preservation. Some noted African writer have depended heavily on oral tradition to achieve stardom. These included Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Christopher Okigbo, Niyi Osundare, Femi Osofisan, JP Clark, Tanure Ojaide and lots more.

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Oral tradition and oral lore are cultural materials and traditions transmitted from generation to generation and they are as old as man himself, the oral tradition is the hallmark element of the human experience all over the world. Oral traditions are stories that people formulate, pick up and carry along as part of their cultural freight. Oral traditions are original forms of education in which both social values and community norms are taught to children through storytelling and moonlight plays. Oral traditions are eventually written down, and can tell so much about the society and the people who originated them, thus, allowing history to be kept and shared by groups who do or did not have writing. It was a good way to keep valuable information for others in the community thereby allowing the literate and the illiterate alike to share the information.

Characteristics and importance of Oral Tradition

Most oral traditions are either passed from generation to generation through traditional songs, stories, legends, dreams, methods and other practices of transmitting specific human elements of oral knowledge. Sometimes, they are preserved in artefacts handed from father to son or mother to daughter. Virtually, all oral traditions are transmitted directly from individual to individual. Other characteristics of OTs are:

- It can be given anywhere and anytime by adult who have some historical facts

- It is less expensive compared to other sources of historical information such as books and museums this is because it does not need selling and buying of information
- It does not need a person to know how to read and write
- It is possible to ask questions from the oral informant so as to acquire in-depth information

Shortcomings of OTs

In spite of the importance and contributions of oral traditions as source materials for historical writing coupled with the fact that there is no historical source that does not have its weaknesses, there are many problems levied against Oral tradition. Some of these problems are succinctly discussed below: The refusal of many foreign and western trained historians to recognize oral traditions or oral historical accounts as really true historical artifacts serves as one of the problems. Their refusal could be attributed partly to a number of factors ranging from racial superiority to failure to appreciate African culture and historical growth.

Besides, oral tradition has been regarded as being liable to distortions. Also, many of the narrators may like to avoid unpleasant facts. Oral traditions could be used to justify situations or claims in the present. This has often led to distortions and fabrications. Another noticeable problem is that of chronology. While written sources may be precise in dates, oral traditions provide no absolute dates. In oral traditions, events are usually dated only to the reigns of chiefs, the outbreak of epidemics or diseases, wars, famine and others. Oral traditions are susceptible to changes due to different social attitudes. Such changes occur in keeping with the generality of opinions that prevail at the time and may also be due to personal ambition such to achieve political aims. Other shortcomings are:

- Oral tradition does not go very far into the past; this means that they are faced with the problem of inability to delve into the past, especially if the custodians had died or suffered from memory loss due to old age or ill-health before capturing the information from them. Thus, transmission of information depends on the power of memories of successive

generations.

- Oral tradition does not maintain the same value of oral history; instead the values keep on changing as time goes by.
- Oral tradition may be biased: This is possible because of its oral nature of transmission which may depend on the emotional, psychological or whatever state of the mind of the narrator at the time of capturing the information. Furthermore, oral transmission is sometimes prone to exaggeration, creativity and sometimes the informant may talk of good things only.

Elements and Transmission of Oral Tradition

In Yoruba land, oral tradition is transmitted or communicated through:

- *Aroko*: passed from one person to another, from one town to another to deliver message
- Town crier (*Alugbeoba, akegbe*)
- *Arodon*: given to a child that disturbs the parent to give such parent ample opportunity to finish whatever task needs to be done before the child arrives.
- *Aale*: This is meant to restrict passers-by, intruders or villagers from touching one's farm produce or goods. Palm branches, brooms, and red cloth are often tied at the entrance s or around such properties.
- Folklores: Folklores are cultural heritages and assertions like proverbs, chants, satire, symbolism, ballads, among others. It serves as an expression of oral traditions and history. Folk can be referred to any group of people who share at least one common factor. It could be a common occupation, language or religion.
- Others are: Epics, myths, legends, fairy tales, fables, proverbs, riddles, songs, jokes, street vendor cries, prayers and festivals
- Marriage: pre-marriage and pre-proposal investigations of family background, *Ibale-vir*

ginity. *Owo-ori* (dowry) Pouring of water on the bride's feet

- Burial ceremonies: pre-burial meetings, burial rites and post-burial meetings (*Adie irana* – ceremonial cock slaughtering, frying of bean cake (akara), use of white clothes to wrap the corpse, etc.)

ORAL HISTORY

Oral history was established in 1948 as a modern technique for historical documentation when Columbia University historian Allan Nevins began recording the memoirs of persons significant in American Life. (North American Oral History Association, as quoted by Thomson, 1998). A primary source (First-hand information communicated by a witness to or a participant in an event or way of life) document created in an interview setting with a narrator for the purpose of collecting and preserving that person's firsthand information about an event, period of time or way of life and making it available to researchers.

The term oral history also refers to the information collected in such an interview. Oral historians believe oral histories result from a process that must contain certain elements. These elements involve the systematic collection of living people's testimony about their own experiences, it is also the process of recording and preserving oral testimony.

Oral history is not folklore, gossip, hearsay, or rumor. Oral history depends upon human memory and the spoken word. The means of collection can vary from taking notes by hand to elaborate electronic aural and video recordings. It begins with an audio or video recording of a first person account made by an interviewer with an interviewee (also referred to as narrator), both of whom have the conscious intention of creating a permanent record to contribute to an understanding of the past. A verbal document, the oral history, results from this process and is preserved and made available in different forms to other users, researchers, and the public. A critical approach to the oral testimony and interpretations are necessary in the use of oral history.

Oral historians define "oral history" as a process that includes the following elements:

A planned, well-researched topic.

An interview based on a prepared guide or outline and recorded in a format that likely will last into the future.

Probing follow-up questions that seek depth and detail.

Standard techniques for processing the recorded interview.

Arrangements for making the interview and related documents available to researchers, generally by depositing them in a public repository.

Adherence to recognised professional ethical and legal standards

WEEK 3: INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE/ INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS (IKS)

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opposed to the scientific knowledge that is generally acquired through formal education or empirical findings.

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Indigenous knowledge is local knowledge that is unique to a given culture acquired by local people

through the accumulation of experiences, informal experiments, and intimate understanding of the

environment in a given culture. It is the actual knowledge of a given population that reflects the

experiences based on traditions and includes more recent experiences with modern technologies. Local people, including farmers, landless laborers, women, rural artisans, and cattle-rearers, are the custodians of indigenous knowledge systems. Indigenous knowledge is dynamic, changing through indigenous mechanisms of creativity and innovativeness as well as through contact with other local and international knowledge systems.

These kinds of knowledge are acquired in the course of their close interactions with nature and natural resources in the environment, this knowledge helps to make certain decisions as to the solutions of the problems encountered during day-to-day communal living while managing the land and environmental resources for survival. Compelling situations motivate them to generate knowledge out of necessities.

Thus, indigenous knowledge is developed based on necessities, instincts, curiosity and observations which differs from one ethnic group to the other. Hence, indigenous knowledge is used in the decision making process as to how, when and where to act depending on the situations and community.

Indigenous knowledge has been tested using the rule of thumb of trial and error methods over a period of time through generations and validated to become an established knowledge for the purpose of which it is designed for use by the ethnic who propounded it for the first time.

Thus, indigenous knowledge varies from tribe to tribe and usually passes on to the next generations through the words of mouth, actions or even practices, usually by the elders of the family/society.

Some authors described indigenous knowledge as accumulated knowledge, skill and technology of the local people derived from systems of production and consumption. It is said to be dynamic and respond to challenges through local adaptations, experimentation, and innovation under diverse and heterogeneous conditions. These successful adaptations are preserved and passed on from one generation to another through oral and /or experimental means.

Indigenous knowledge (IK) is used at the local level by communities as the basis for decision making in agriculture, human and animal health care, education, natural resource management, food security, food preparation, and a host of other vital activities in rural communities. Indigenous knowledge is considered to be cultural knowledge in its broadest sense, including all of the social, political, economic and spiritual aspects of a local way of life. In other words, Indigenous knowledge is a way of knowing, seeing, thinking and doing things by a community of people over time which has become part of them.

Sustainable development researchers have found the following categories of indigenous knowledge to be of particular interest: resource management, knowledge, tools, techniques, practices and rules related to pastoralism, agriculture, agroforestry, water management and the gathering of wild food; classification systems for plants, animals, soils, water and weather; empirical knowledge about flora, fauna and inanimate resources and their practical uses; and the worldview or way the local group perceives its relationship to the natural world.

Characteristics of IKS

- It is practically a common sense that is based on teachings and experiences passed on from generation to generation.
- It covers knowledge of the environment, snow, ice, weather, resources and the relationships between things.
- It is holistic, i.e., it cannot be compartmentalised and cannot be separated from the people who hold it. It is rooted in the spiritual, health, culture and language of the people. Thus, it is a way of life.
- It is generated within communities and gives credibility to the people (Agrawal, 1995)
- It is location and culture specific (Ahmed, 1994)
- It is often the basis for decision making and a survival strategy (Agrawal, 1995)
- IK is Oral and rural in nature, hence not systematically documented
- It is concerned with critical issues of human and animal life: livestock production and natural resource management
- It is dynamic and based on innovation, adaptation, and experimentation
- IK is generated within communities
- IK is location and culture specific
- IK is the basis for decision making and survival strategies
- IK is not systematically documented
- IK concerns critical issues of human and animal life: primary production, human and animal life, natural resource management